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Ms Sue Hughes
Headteacher
Springfield Junior School
Springfield Road
Swadlincote
DE11 0BU

Dear Ms Hughes

Special measures monitoring inspection of Springfield Junior School

Following my visit to your school on 2–3 October 2013, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm my findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school's previous monitoring inspection.

This was the third monitoring visit since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in November 2012. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that, at this time, the school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying them both to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Derbyshire County Council.

Yours sincerely

John Peckham
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in November 2012

- Improve the quality of teaching to good or better so that all pupils make rapid progress by ensuring that teachers:
 - plan tasks that are at the right level of difficulty for pupils of all abilities
 - have higher expectations of pupils' presentation, punctuation and spelling
 - question pupils more effectively to check their understanding of what they are learning and to make them think hard
 - deploy support staff more effectively to work with pupils of all abilities
 - improve the marking of pupils' work, especially in mathematics, so that pupils are well informed about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
 - provide more opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and mathematical skills.

- Improve the quality and impact of leadership, including governance, by:
 - checking teaching more rigorously so that the causes of underachievement are known and the steps each teacher needs to take to improve their performance are identified
 - using the outcomes of such checks to provide tailored training and support for staff, including opportunities for them to observe outstanding practice
 - ensuring that teachers who lead subjects are held to account for teaching and progress in their subject
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and managing staff turnover more effectively
 - ensuring that other leaders are less reliant on the headteacher and are more effective at securing improvement themselves.

Report on the third monitoring inspection on 2–3 October 2013

Evidence

The inspector observed parts of eight lessons and scrutinised school policies, records of the governing body, evidence of the school's own monitoring and self-evaluation and records of the external support being provided to the school. The inspector met with school senior leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, the local authority school improvement adviser and the Local Leader of Education who is supporting the school. Discussions were also held with pupils, both formally and informally in lessons, in the playground and in the dining room.

Context

Three teachers left the school at the end of the summer term. A new teacher joined the school and an experienced teacher has been seconded to the school as assistant headteacher and literacy coordinator. There is currently one long-term supply teacher covering a maternity leave and a part-time teacher supporting management release time for the deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher. A specialist languages teacher has been employed to provide some French teaching during the planning time of class teachers.

The Chair of the Governing Body resigned in the summer and the local authority has arranged for a highly experienced governor from another school to be seconded to the Springfield governing body. She was elected as Chair at the first meeting of the autumn term. A National Leader of Governance has been working with the governing body since the summer term.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The results of National Curriculum tests and teacher assessments for the pupils reaching the end of Key Stage 2 in July 2013 showed little improvement from the previous year. In writing, the proportion achieving Level 4 and above was slightly less than last year, although more pupils attained Level 5 than previously. In reading, results were better, with a significantly higher proportion of pupils achieving the standards expected for their age. In mathematics, fewer children achieved the expected levels, although the proportion who attained Level 5 increased slightly. The proportion of pupils making expected progress from their starting points in Year 3 changed very little from last year: slightly better in mathematics, but lower in English.

The considerable staffing turbulence of the past few years has had a significant impact on the progress of pupils, and standards of literacy, in particular, are low for many children currently in the school. There are signs this year, however, that a fully staffed school and actions taken by school leaders are beginning to show some

impact. The regular and consistent use of 'Big Maths' has brought about a significant improvement in the speed and accuracy of calculations. A new consistency of approach to the presentation of pupils' work is helping to improve the quality of written work. Teachers are now setting more homework, with a regular focus on mathematics, English and spelling.

Teachers keep careful records of pupils' learning and these are now being better used to track and monitor progress. These records show that some pupils have made very little progress during the last two years and now have a great deal of catching up to do. The way in which the school currently sets progress targets for children is not ambitious enough. Too few pupils are challenged to make faster progress, even where they might have the capability to do so.

Assessment records are now being much more effectively used to identify pupils who are falling behind, and one-to-one tuition and small-group work is being used to help them catch up.

The quality of teaching

The teaching observed during this inspection showed some improvements from the last visit in June 2013. In most lessons, teachers take care to ensure that pupils can build on their prior learning and are given work to do that is suitably challenging. The school recognises that there is still scope for improvement in this respect, and close monitoring by the deputy headteacher has helped to improve teachers' planning in the early weeks of the term. Further training is planned as the term progresses, with a particular focus on ensuring that there is always opportunity for more-able pupils to extend their learning to the maximum. Well-trained and briefed teaching assistants support students with specific learning difficulties very well.

In lessons observed, teaching was generally well paced. Pupils reported much less time now sitting and listening to teachers talk than used to be the case. The practice of different teachers is still variable. The most effective teachers spend very little time talking to the whole class, they enable quick access to work and activity, and spend the bulk of their time working with table groups. Other teachers are still inclined to spend too long introducing topics to the whole class, which limits the time available for pupils to make progress. Teachers do not always apply the same rigour to work in other subjects as is the case in English and mathematics. Opportunities are missed to reinforce high standards of presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Teachers are developing better questioning, and a variety of approaches were observed. Opportunities were not always taken, however, to allow pupils who had not reached the correct solution to explore their reasoning, correct themselves, and so build their confidence. Misconceptions in mathematics were not always followed up effectively.

The revised marking policy is now being much better applied, and most books scrutinised had been regularly marked with useful comments. Not all teachers, however, are giving sufficient priority to ensuring that pupils act on advice, make corrections or extend their work. Where this does take place, pupils are very appreciative and recognise how much it helps them to improve.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils have very positive attitudes to their learning and to school generally. The behaviour observed during this inspection was mostly excellent. This is because it is well managed by teachers and because most are now correctly applying the school's behaviour policies. Pupils reported that even the small number of children with very challenging behaviour are now being better managed and that they rarely disrupt learning. Teachers and other adults are highly proactive in modelling and teaching good behaviour. This was illustrated at break by the excellent ways in which adults helped children to play constructively with a range of equipment, leading, supervising and then withdrawing once safe, cooperative play was established. In a Year 4 religious studies lesson, the teacher emphasised the school's value of 'respect' well to ensure that pupils responded sensitively to worship rituals from another culture.

The school has a very orderly and safe atmosphere. Pupils report that they feel very safe, that bullying is very rare and that the school deals with it well when it does occur. During the inspection, a 'Bikeability' course was being run and, recently, a 'Scooter Smart' course was held to encourage road safety.

Attendance for the first few weeks of this year shows an improvement from previous years and is better than the average for all primary schools. Most pupils are punctual to school and to their lessons.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The school has begun this year with a full complement of teaching and support staff, with all principal leadership roles properly allocated and a greater clarity of direction. This is a substantial improvement on previously and is already showing impact in learning that is more consistent. Leaders are being much more prescriptive about their expectations for teachers, and they are monitoring teaching to ensure that teachers properly apply policies and expectations. Leaders' evaluation of the quality of the school's work is broadly accurate but, to date, they have only measured progress in the school's development plan by checking the actions that have been taken. Systems that will enable the impact of changes in improved pupil progress and higher quality of teaching are only in the process of being developed. Many leaders are, however, still new to their roles this year and so it is too early to assess their impact in raising standards.

Opportunities have been missed to create greater clarity and better support for teachers' planning, with a concise, single document of key policies relating to teaching and learning. Currently, there are five separate documents, which make quick reference difficult. On occasions, evidenced for example in the shared planning for the teaching of mathematical operations in Year 6, the practice in the classroom is ahead of the written policy.

Leaders have made a number of structural changes to allocate more teaching time to English, mathematics and science. The creative curriculum has been re-planned to provide greater coherence. In Year 4, for example, the theme of Harry Potter has been used effectively to make learning about solids, liquids and gasses more exciting and fun. The creative curriculum in Year 3 provides a wealth of opportunities for children to develop their writing and mathematical skills.

There is now in place a robust system for monitoring the progress of pupils, and teachers are able to update information weekly. Leaders now recognise that the school's approach to setting targets is insufficiently challenging to enable the overall achievement of the school to become good.

Governors have engaged constructively with a National Leader of Governance, who is helping them to reorganise the way in which they conduct their business. The local authority has proposed an experienced governor who has been elected Chair and a new Vice-Chair is also now in place. An audit of skills has been undertaken and training is planned. Records of governing body meetings for the last year, however, show that there has been insufficient focus on the school's progress out of special measures. Reports from the school have focused on actions taken; governors do not yet have clear ways to measure improving performance during the year.

External support

The local authority has invested a substantial quantity of support in this school since it went into special measures. The school improvement adviser has regularly monitored the school's actions. Since the last inspection, the school improvement adviser's work has had major impact on reforming the governing body. The new group has only met once, so it is too early to evaluate their impact, but indications are positive that they will be better equipped to support and challenge the school's leadership in the coming year.

The local authority's consultants have continued to provide very useful, practical support to the school, working alongside school leaders and coaching teachers.